

Spreckels Building & Theater
123 Broadway
San Diego
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1966

HABS
CAL,
37-SANDI,
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SPRECKELS BUILDING
& THEATER

HABS NO. CA-1966

HABS
CAL,
37-SANDI,
24-

Location: 123 Broadway (South side of Broadway between 1st and 2nd Avenues), San Diego, San Diego County, California

Present Owner: Mrs. Jacquelin Littlefield

Present Occupant: Theatre and Offices

Present Use: Theatre and Office Building

Statement of Significance: Built just after the San Francisco earthquake, this building was designed by the Los Angeles architect, Harrison Albright to be earthquake and fire proof and provide the ultimate in mechanical equipment for heating and ventilating. The theatre has two outstanding features--it is all open space with no pillars blocking views and the accoustics are pronounced to be perfect.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original owner was John D. Spreckels. Legal description of the prbperty: Lots A,B,C,D,E,H,I,J,K,L, Block 40 of Horton's Addition.

On December 28, 1906 these lots were purchased by J. D. Spreckels, a sugar magnate, for \$10 and other considerations from the Security Savings Bank and Trust Company.

The Spreckels estate owned this building until 1943 when it was purchased by the Star and Crescent Investment Co., Capt. Oakley J. Hall, President, for \$500,000. In 1964, Mrs. Jacquelin Metzger Shlaes Littlefield (daughter of ex-Universal Studios head Louis Metzger, who had been managing the theatre) bought the building for \$1,650,000 and spent \$125,000 remodeling the theatre.

2. Date of erection: Construction was begun in 1911 and the theatre was opened to the public August 1912. The lavish theatre and modern office building were constructed at a cost of \$1 million. Architecturally, it is Classical Revival influenced by the Chicago school.
3. Architect: Harrlson Albright of Los Angeles
4. Builder: F.E. Engstrum. Arthur Hurlt did the interior artwork. The allegorical paintings in oil over the stage and in the ceiling were executed by Emil T. Mazy of Los Angeles. Thomas E. Wylie and A. M. Paton were responsible for the construction of the stage and scenery.
5. Alterations and additions: When the structure was origrnally built in 1911-12, every feature was thoroughly modern; therefore the building has remained basically unchanged.

In August 1931, to advertise moving pictures, a new marquee costing \$50,000 was installed. At the time, it was the largest and most costly on the West Coast.

New wide-range sound equipment for motion pictures, first major installation of its kind in San Diego, was installed in the Spreckels Theatre in July 1933.

When Mrs. Littlefield purchased the building, the theatre was put through a restoration costing \$125,000. All wall, cornices, parapets and moldings were repainted to their original form--gold was dry brushed over a mushroom-hued base to accent the third dimension. Only those art treasures in the dome have gone unpainted. New seats replaced the old and were more generously spaced--from 1915 to 1500. Restoration was made by Wilfred and Russell Chartier of the Chartier Painting Co., George Lykos, architect, and Edwin V. Harris, general contractor. In 1976, Mrs. Littlefield removed motion picture capabilities and has launched a legitimate theatre schedule, returning the Spreckels to its original use.

B. Historical Events & Persons Connected With the Structure

The Spreckels building and theatre was built by sugar magnate John D. Spreckels for prominent theatre manager, Jack Dodge, to manage. Mr. Spreckels felt that San Diego needed a legitimate theatre in addition to a boosting of the economy and employment. He also felt strongly that San Diego should develop south of Broadway to the Bay and eventually built seven (the Spreckels was #3) on the south side of Broadway.

Opening night of the theatre was the most notable occasion in the City's history. Many prominent people from Los Angeles and San Francisco attended as well as the social elite from San Diego. The Broadway musical "Bought and Paid For" was brought 4,000 miles to the opening with many of the original Broadway cast appearing.

During the first year, the Orpheum vaudeville circuit passed through the theatre. "Ben Hur" (complete with a horse drawn chariot race that extended through the First Avenue doors, galloped across the huge stage and exited via Second Avenue doors) was the first year finale.

The list is extensive of the famous persons who appeared at the Spreckels Theatre during those early years before motion pictures took over the theatre. A few of the prominent persons are listed below:

Will Rogers
Anna Pavlova
Al Jolson
Ina Claire
Enrico Caruso
Lionel Barrymore

Bela Lugosi
Joe E. Brown
Ronald Coleman
William Powell
Mary Pickford
John Barrymore

C. Sources of Information

San Diego Historical Site Board Files-San Diego Historical Site No. 76
On the National Register - May 28/75

San Diego Historical Society - Miscellaneous Files

San Diego Public Library, California Room

San Diego Union Newspaper Files and Miscellaneous Files

Title Insurance and Trust Co. - Photo Files

San Diego City Planning Staff's Report on Historic Preservation by Angeles Lei

Prepared by:

Jacquelin Littlefield
and

Jo Middough

August 4, 1972

Addendum to:
SPRECKELS BUILDING AND THEATER
123 Broadway
San Diego
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1966

HABS
CAL,
37-SANDI,
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABSCAL
37-SANDI.
24—

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Addendum to:
SPRECKELS BUILDING AND THEATER
123 Broadway
San Diego
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1966

Data pages 1 through 3 were previously transmitted to the Library of Congress. This is data page 4.

INVENTORY OF PHOTOGRAMMETRIC IMAGES

The glass photogrammetric plates listed below are not reproducible except with special permission. However, reference prints and film copy negatives have been made from the plates indicated by an asterisk (*) and are included in the Library of Congress collection of formal HABS/HAER photographs.

- 4 5" x 7" glass plate negatives (2 stereopairs) produced by Perry E. Borchers of the Ohio State University in 1971.

One survey control contact print per plate; survey control information for each pair.

LC-HABS-GS05-B-1971-1501L *	NORTH FACADE--LEVEL
LC-HABS-GS05-B-1971-1501R	NORTH FACADE--LEVEL
	Left and right overlap: 80%
LC-HABS-GS05-B-1971-1502L *	NORTH FACADE--INCLINED
LC-HABS-GS05-B-1971-1502R	NORTH FACADE--INCLINED
	Left and right overlap: 95%

PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Photogrammetric images were incorporated into the HABS/HAER collections in the summers of 1985 and 1986. Inventories of the images were compiled and filed

SPRECKELS BUILDING AND THEATER
HABS No. CA-1966
Data (Page 5)

as data pages for each structure recorded. Since the glass photogrammetric plates are not reproducible except with special permission, a reference print and film copy negative were made from one plate of each stereopair and from the most informative plates in sequential sets. The reference prints and copy negatives were then incorporated into the formal HABS/HAER photograph collections.

The Photogrammetric Images Project was a cooperative endeavor between the HABS/HAER Division of the National Park Service and the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. The reference prints and film copy negatives of the original plates were made by the Library of Congress Photoduplication Service with funds provided by the Library of Congress Flat Film Preservation Fund. Additional reproductions were made by HABS/HAER. The project was supervised by HABS/HAER Architect John A. Burns, AIA, and completed by HABS Historians Jeanne C. Lawrence (University of London) in 1985 and Caroline R. Alderson (Columbia University) in 1986.